



What is behind mastitis treatment registrations?

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Published in:
Health and welfare of dairy animals

Publication date:
2014

Document version
Early version, also known as pre-print

Citation for published version (APA):
Svennesen, L., Enevoldsen, C., & Klaas, I. C. (2014). What is behind mastitis treatment registrations? In C. H. Knight (Ed.), *Health and welfare of dairy animals: proceedings of the first Dairycare Conference 2014* (pp. 21). [5.2]

5.1

In-line milk analysis and identification of health and reproduction events

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Sensors to monitor health and reproduction events have been developed in recent years in order to save labour time and secure a high degree of detection of events that need the attention of the farmer. The systems enable the farmer to overlook and manage larger farms. Early diagnose of diseases also improves animal welfare as discomfort associated with disease is minimized due to early intervention. So far, measurements in milk have been available to farmers either on-line (electrical conductivity, colour, Somatic Cell Count) or off-line (California Mastitis Test, bacterial culture, Somatic Cell Count, Progesterone and lately the PAG pregnancy test). A number of systems based on cow activity have been developed to monitor heat, and some of these systems also include monitoring of chewing activity. Many systems, however, deliver huge amounts of unprocessed data, which leaves the user with laborious data filtering. One major obstacle to most sensing systems is that they are stand-alone systems, and therefore the farmer has to combine the output from these systems with other available data in order to make a management decision.

Recently an online system for the management of mastitis, ketosis, reproduction and protein feeding has been developed in Denmark, the Herd Navigator™. The system will automatically sample milk during milking from selected cows, analyze for four milk constituents. The analytical data are analyzed in biological models together with other cow specific data and presented to the farmer on the farm computer as advice with a Standard Operations Procedure attached. The Herd Navigator™ can be considered a “Whole System Approach”, as it selects cows in need of measurements, a sensor system, biological algorithms, data condensation and issue of timely warnings to the farmer of specific states of the cow, together with suggested intervention procedures, set up by the farmer in the Herd Management System.

The advantage of analysis of time series of specific milk constituents over unspecific data is obvious. A system using specific constituents can issue specific diagnoses, and in particular the continuous measurements of milk progesterone have the advantage of also detecting silent heats, ovarian cystic conditions, abortions and pregnancy.

5.2

What is behind mastitis treatment registrations?

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Recordings of mastitis treatment data are often used for welfare assessment and mastitis control in herd health management and research, based on national or regional databases. Treatment data available in central databases may be incomplete, and the decision whether to treat mastitis with antibiotics or not is highly dependent on management and farmer's decisions. In larger herds with several employees the selection of cows for antibiotic treatment may be very complex. Knowing what is behind the registered mastitis treatment cases is essential to evaluate whether changes in mastitis incidence are caused by changes in health or changes in management policies. To our knowledge, the complete path from mastitis detection to registration in a central database, including the interaction between several actors in larger herds, has not been investigated previously. The aim of our study was to describe the path from detection to registration of mastitis cases and understand the interaction between different actors in the process of selecting cows for antibiotic treatments. We did a qualitative case study in a Danish organic farm milking approximately 600 cows. All actors involved in detecting and treatment of mastitis were interviewed and observed during their daily routines. The employees' registrations of observed cases of mastitis were evaluated together with the herd veterinarian's treatment records and registrations in the national database. The study confirmed that the selection of cows for antibiotic treatment is complex. Three levels of actors: milkers, herd manager and herd veterinarian had different definitions and treatment thresholds affected by e.g. weekday, staff rotation, previous treatments and somatic cell count. Drying off single quarters was used as an alternative to antibiotic treatment. Important loss of information occurred between milkers and herd manager, whereas the veterinarian registered almost all treatments in the database. In conclusion, the 'human decision factor' related to detection and registration of treated mastitis cases may be more important than biological and management-related risk factors. Thus, we suggest to always attempting to answer the question “what is behind the registrations” prior to any use of the registrations for research or management, and to expect every herd to be unique.



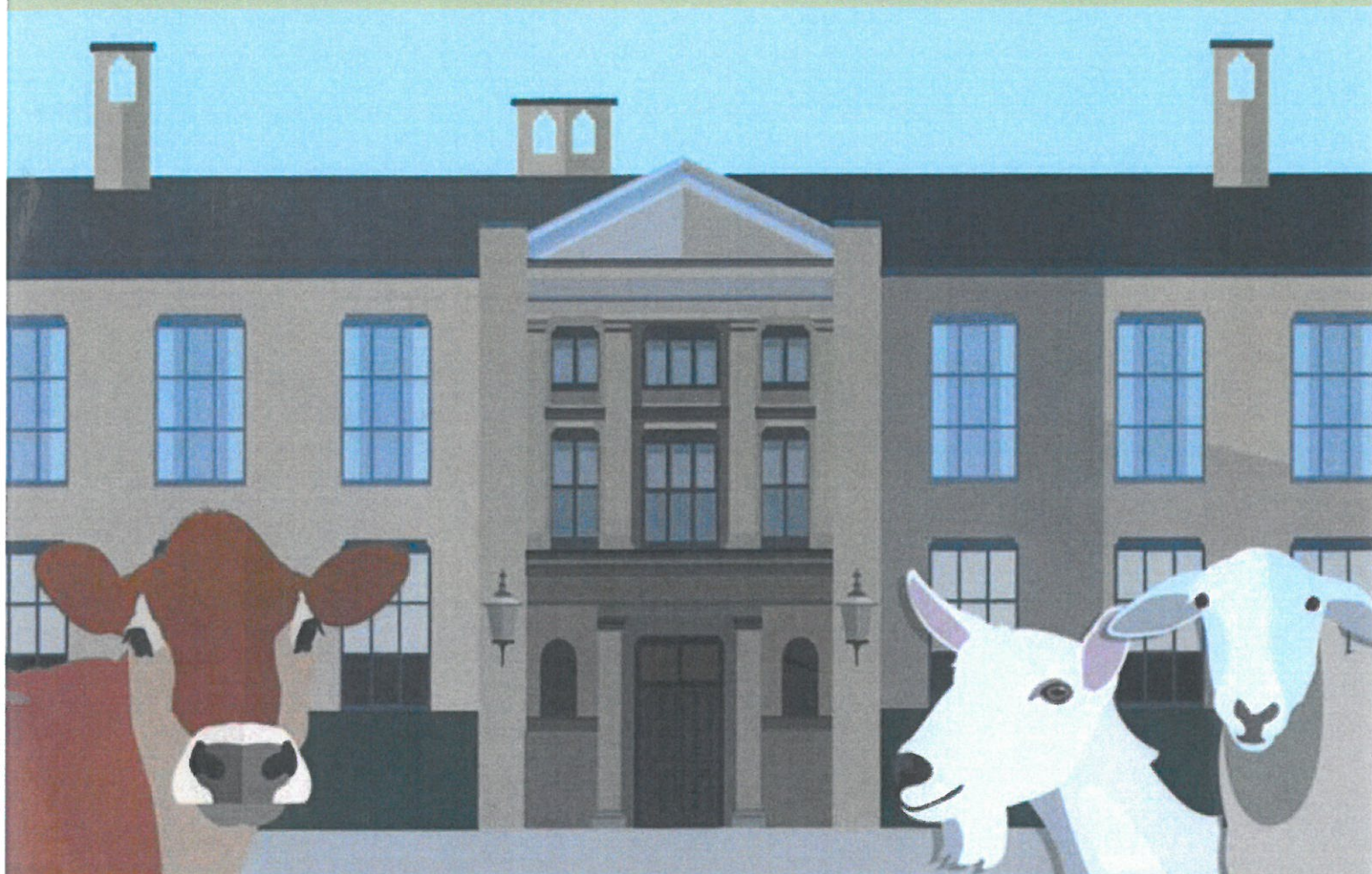
Health and Welfare of Dairy Animals

PROCEEDINGS

of the

FIRST DAIRYCARE CONFERENCE 2014

Copenhagen, August 22nd and 23rd 2014



COST FA1308
www.dairycareaction.org



Proceedings of the First DairyCare Conference 2014

Editor: C H Knight

Published by DairyCare COST Action FA1308

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ISBN 978-0-9930176-0-5

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This volume comprises the Abstracts of presentations made at the First DairyCare Conference held in Copenhagen, August 22nd and 23rd 2014. DairyCare is a COST Action (FA1308) and the holding of the Conference was supported by COST under the Horizon 2020 programme. Further information about DairyCare can be found at www.dairycareaction.org and about COST at www.cost.eu





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